

Upon reading this chapter, the first thing that came to mind was a quote from Paul Farmer, “The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that is wrong with the world.” I’m inclined to believe that Gregory Boyle would agree with this statement in light of what he does at Homeboy Industries.

Homeboy Industries is about helping the people that society has turned their back on. He understands not everyone that he works with will turn into a “success story” in the traditional sense, but he sees “success” differently than taking a gang member and turning him into a productive citizen. It isn’t a black-and-white situation.

The traditional definition of success he examines is that of choosing “evidence-based outcomes”. He concedes this approach is sensible and practical, but not always the best. If that was the road to success he chose, he wouldn’t have chosen to start Homeboy Industries because he had no reason to believe it could be wildly successful in changing members of a society notorious for violence and criminal activity. Instead, he chose a road characterized by faithfulness and persistence, only accepting success as a by-product.

He has made quite a difference in taking this approach. He’s helped people like Cesar realize they are worthy of God’s love, and through people like Pedro, he’s seen the power of the slow work of God. Boyle teaches us that success “becomes God’s business if we surrender our need for results and outcomes”. Playing it safe and only associating with people that will give you good results won’t change the people that need it the most.

In fact, Boyle says there is one thing that he sees as more valuable than success: kinship. I think many of us can agree that forming a relationship with people we try to help is important, but is it really more valuable than actually helping them succeed? My initial reaction was no. I’m sure I’m not the only one.

That’s what makes his view of success so different. Many of us have a keep-your-eyes-on-the-prize kind of mentality, focusing on the end result, while Boyle views success in terms of the journey taken to get there—he wants to make the journey count just as much, if not more than the actual destination. That’s why he says, when he’s being honest with himself, all he wants is to share his life with the poor, regardless of the results. He isn’t bogged down by a performance review; he simply wants to be there for them and know them, which is just as impactful on their lives.

It’s this view of understanding where other people are coming from that is crucial in a college education. College is the perfect time and place to learn about the world in all of its aspects and provide an awareness about those people that need help. The ultimate thing a college education can do to answer the question, “how ought we to live?” is to provide evidence for the answer of, “in service to others”.